

Department of Human Services

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Doctors reported abuse of beaten boy 8 days before his death

Tuesday, June 05, 2007

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Doctors at a Wayne State University family medical clinic noticed signs of abuse on 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge shortly after he was placed with the Detroit foster mother standing trial this week in Wayne County Circuit Court for his death.

Dr. Pierre Morris told jurors today that he and another doctor at the clinic were concerned about a large bruise on Isaac's forehead, marks on his arms and a scrape on his back noticed during a doctor's visit on Aug. 4, 2006 and reported the alleged abuse to the state Department of Human Services on Aug. 8 -- eight days before the boy died.

Charlise Adams-Rogers, 60, is charged with involuntary manslaughter, a 15-year felony, for not protecting Isaac from abuse prosecutors alleged was occurring in the home in the 18000 block of Greenlawn.

She also is charged with two counts of child abuse for her treatment of both Isaac and his older sister who was also in Adam-Rogers' care. She could serve up to four years on the most serious of those charges.

The two children were removed from their biological parents in June 2005 and had endured several unsuccessful foster placements before arriving at Adams-Rogers' home.

No one has been charged with causing the specific injuries that resulted in Isaac's death, which included second-degree burns to the child's upper chest, his abdomen and behind his right ear.

But prosecutors allege that abuse was occurring in the home and Adams-Rogers should have taken steps to protect the children in her care.

Today, testimony revealed that the abuse of Isaac and his then 4-year-old sister began well before they were sent to live with Adams-Rogers, a retired Chrysler worker who had cared for dozens of foster children for a number of years.

According to Morris, the little girl showed signs of sexual abuse and tested positive for Hepatitis B when first brought to his clinic by a previous foster parent on April 18, 2006.

State officials suspended the license of the Lula Belle Stewart Center, in the wake of Isaac's death. The Detroit foster care agency was supposed to oversee the foster children's placement.

The case, which is in its second day of testimony, continues this afternoon.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

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June 6, 2007

Detroit

Mom faced nine complaints

State found former abuse claims to be unsubstantiated on foster parent now charged in death of Isaac Lethbridge, 2.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Nine abuse complaints were lodged with the state Department of Human Services against the Detroit foster mother charged in the death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge, according to court testimony Tuesday.

Charlise Adams-Rogers, 60, is charged with involuntary manslaughter, a 15-year felony, for not protecting Isaac from abuse prosecutors allege was occurring in the home. She's also charged with two counts of child abuse for her treatment of Isaac and his then 4-year-old sister.

All of the complaints against Adams-Rogers were investigated by social services workers but found to be unsubstantiated, according to Theresa Collins, a state Child Protective Services worker assigned to investigate Isaac's Aug. 16 death.

In testimony from Isaac's doctor, the family's live-in child care assistant, a neighbor and the EMT who tried to revive Isaac on the day he died, Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey attempted to portray the Adams-Rogers household as a neighborhood hangout where Isaac and his sister often were unattended or left in the care of older children.

Six adults and eight children were in the house the day Isaac died, according to Deborah Roberts, who received room and board in exchange for watching two pre-teens in the home. She said she didn't know where Isaac was for several hours before his body was discovered on the floor of an upstairs hallway by one of the older children.

"(The older child) calls downstairs to her mother in the kitchen and says something is wrong with Isaac," Roberts testified. "Isaac was on the floor in the hallway under a fan and he was unconscious. He had a blue knot on his forehead, and he had three red blotches on his stomach by his navel -- they were very vivid red."

Dr. Pierre Morris, a physician who treated Isaac and his sister at the Wayne State University Family Medicine Clinic testified Tuesday that the girl showed signs of sexual abuse and tested positive for hepatitis B when first brought to his clinic by a previous foster parent on April 18, 2006.

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Witness says she's being intimidated Detroit

June 6, 2007

BY RUBY L. BAILEY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

On a day when prosecutors continued to paint a picture of neglect and abuse in the Detroit foster home where a 2-year-old boy was killed last year, one of the witnesses who testified Tuesday said she was being intimidated in the courtroom.

Charlsie Adams-Rogers, 60, is charged with involuntary manslaughter in connection with Isaac Lethbridge's death from blunt-force injuries in her home on Aug. 16, 2006. She also is charged with child abuse involving Isaac and his 4-year-old sister, who was in foster care with him.

At one point, Starkemia Taylor, who has two children with Derrick Williams, Adams-Rogers' son, whispered to a Wayne County Circuit Court clerk that she was being intimidated by spectators in a rear row. Judge Vera Massey Jones said Taylor said Williams was in the group. The couple split last year.

Massey Jones had an officer escort the group out. They said they were in court to attend to another matter, the officer told the judge. They were not held or asked to produce identification. Out of earshot of the jury, Massey Jones later said the group was "staring down the young lady who was testifying."

"I was watching them," the judge said. "I saw what they were doing."

Defense attorney Warren Harris and members of Adams-Rogers' family said they did not know the group and that Williams was not among them. A few weeks ago, Massey Jones jailed Adams-Rogers for 48 hours after Taylor told prosecutors that Adams-Rogers had threatened her.

"Why would we want to try to harm my mother's case?" Dana Rogers, Adams-Rogers' daughter, said later.

In her testimony, Taylor said Isaac and his sister were not well-cared-for. She said the boy was often left with Adams-Rogers' then-12-year-old adopted daughter, who Taylor said hit Isaac. After Isaac's death, the girl told investigators she accidentally hurt him by throwing him on a mattress.

In other testimony, Deborah Roberts, hired by Adams-Rogers in 2006 as a caretaker in exchange for room and board, said she would not have allowed the 12-year-old to bathe or feed the children had she known the girl had anger issues and acted out sexually.

Her testimony is expected to continue today.

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Boyfriend faces murder charge for baby's death

Prosecution: He hit girl in Washington drugstore parking lot

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A 31-year-old Clay Township man was ordered to face a felony murder charge for the 2003 death of a 10-month-old daughter of his girlfriend.

Anthony J. Rizzo was bound over to Macomb County Circuit Court on Tuesday by Judge Denis LeDuc of 42-1 District Court in Romeo for the July '03 death of Kala Faye Kacarka of Algonac, who died from blunt force trauma to her head.

He also faces a charge of first-degree child abuse, with second-degree murder and manslaughter charges as alternates to the felony murder charge.

The case against Rizzo is circumstantial as prosecutors believe he struck the girl in the five to 10 minutes he was alone with her in his car in the parking lot of a Rite Aid store at 26 Mile Road and Van Dyke in Washington Township.

The girl's mother, Tracy Ann Kuhr, 24, of Clay, testified Tuesday that she and Rizzo stopped about 8:15 p.m. July 8, 2003, on their way home to Clay from Shelby Township to buy items for the baby.

When Kuhr left the Silverado, the baby was sleeping in a car seat in the back seat.

When she returned, Rizzo "was standing outside the vehicle with her (Kala's) side door open and her bottle in his hand," she said on the stand, noting that Rizzo "never" fed Kala.

He told her "it seemed like she was having a hard time breathing. There was something in her throat," she said.

When they drove away, Kala seemed OK at first but soon started having breathing problems again.

"She was really struggling to breathe so I started to give her CPR," she said.

They took Kala to Mount Clemens Regional Medical Center, and she was transferred to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit. She was pronounced dead two days later.

Kanu Virani, a medical examiner in St. Clair County, testified that Kala died from blunt force to the top front of her head, although there was no skull fracture. The trauma caused brain bleeding and her eventual death. He said the injuries likely occurred seconds or minutes -- 30 minutes maximum -- prior to when she started having breathing problems.

Kuhr testified that she saw no prior abuse by Rizzo toward her child.

Lynnmarie Steel of Clay, a neighbor of Rizzo, testified she once saw Rizzo strike his own son with the back of his hand over the boy "saying something silly" in the late 1990s when he was about 7 or 8 years old.

Steel said it was "common knowledge" that Rizzo "did not like children."

The case is being prosecuted by the cold case unit of the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office.

Rizzo's defense attorney, Jeffrey Stone, raised questions about potential prior injuries and sickness suffered by the girl.

The girl at the time of her death had a cold and throat infection, as Kuhr had taken her to her pediatrician July 3. But Kuhr and the doctor who examined her said she was not having significant breathing problems.

Stone raised the question of possible chronic bleeding in her brain, but Virani disputed that.

Stone also pointed out the baby had been having trouble sleeping but had been sleeping well the week before her death. He questioned Kuhr about an alleged prior statement by Kuhr that Kala often fell down. But Kuhr said she fell only one time on her "butt."

Assistant Macomb prosecutor Steven Kaplan said that any references to other potential injuries are "smoke and mirrors" by the defense to distract from the main issue because the injury that caused Kala's death is specific.

Kuhr had been dating Rizzo since the prior February and often had been staying with Rizzo, Kala and Rizzo's roommate at Rizzo's mobile home. Kuhr said she is now engaged to another man.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/060607/loc_mcharge001.shtml

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June 5, 2007

Jury in Warren child-torture case goes home without verdict

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A Macomb County jury went home today after deliberating for more than three hours without reaching a verdict in the case of a 30-year-old Warren woman accused of abusing her adopted twin 8-year-old girls.

Tamika Williams is charged with two counts of torture and two counts of first degree child abuse.

Prosecutors had alleged that during beat them with cable wire, shoes and exercise equipment; bathed them in bleach water; burned them with cigarettes; and dunked them in a toilet filled with urine since she adopted them in 2005 from a foster care home in Southfield.

The children are alleged to have suffered bruises, welts and burns until they were taken from the home in November 2006. They are now in foster care.

Williams could face up to life in prison if she is convicted.

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June 6, 2007

Mount Clemens

Jury deliberates abuse case

Warren mom faces up to life in prison on charges involving adopted twin girls; verdict could come today.

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A Macomb County jury today will resume deliberations in the case of a 30-year-old Warren woman charged with abusing and torturing her adopted 8-year-old twin daughters.

Tamika Williams is charged with two counts of torture and two counts of first-degree child abuse for allegedly hitting the girls with a variety of household objects that caused bruises, welts and scars over their bodies.

The four-man, eight-woman jury began their deliberations Tuesday afternoon after the prosecutor and defense attorney presented passionate -- and at times graphic -- closing arguments. The two girls testified about their injuries on Friday.

Macomb Assistant Prosecutor Jennifer Andary called the injuries to the girls "brutal" and "sadistic."

"She had custody of these girls, but she did not care for them," Andary said.

Defense attorney Ronald Goldstein alluded to the girls' troubled past in other foster care homes and suggested their injuries may have been self-inflicted.

"They had a history of lying," he said.

He added that the girls stole food while living with Williams and gave conflicting testimony. He also questioned why, if Williams did beat the girls, their injuries not severe enough to cause the children to be taken to the hospital.

"There were no fractures on either child," he said.

"I would imagine there would be a fracture or something indicative (of) damage to the bone."

Andary countered that Williams didn't want to injure the girls bad enough to have the abuse discovered. She also questioned why two children who wanted a home would make up a story.

"What do they have to gain by coming forward and telling us the truth being removed from another home?" Andary said.

If she is convicted, Williams could face up to life in prison.

The jury foreman said the jury needed another half day of deliberations to come to a verdict.

Circuit Judge Mary Chrzanowski dismissed jurors just before 5 p.m.

After Andary completed her closing remarks, she made one final plea to the jury.

"(The girls) have had a number of systems fail them. Don't let the justice system fail them," Andary said.

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Charges uncertain in baby's death

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

By Kim Crawford

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FLINT - A Flint homicide investigator said Tuesday that results of medical tests and an autopsy could determine whether a 25-year-old woman will be charged in the death of her stillborn baby.

"That's probably going to be the determining factor," said Flint police Sgt. Mike Angus.

The woman, who was hospitalized Sunday and reportedly was in her 35th week of pregnancy, went into labor and delivered a stillborn baby girl at Hurley Medical Center after she allegedly struck her own abdomen approximately 10 times.

The woman was in critical condition at the time of delivery.

Angus said the woman has other children, but they were removed from her custody by Child Protective Services workers of the state Department of Human Services.

While state law allows charges against a person who causes the death of a fetus, how that law would apply to a woman who causes the death of her own unborn child isn't clear, said assistant Genesee County prosecutor Tim Bograkos.

"It's an interesting legal issue, but at this point we'd have to research that," said Bograkos.

Bograkos said prosecutors will await the results of the medical tests before deciding on whether charges will be filed.

Authorities say the case is tragic on many levels, but particularly because a 2001 state law allows a woman who doesn't want her newborn baby to turn it over to a hospital, police or firefighters without being prosecuted.

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Kidnap suspect arrested

By KURT HAUGLIE, Houghton Mining Gazette

ONTONAGON — A man wanted for kidnapping two of his children was arrested Tuesday by Ontonagon County Sheriff's deputies in Porcupine Mountain Wilderness State Park.

Undersheriff Dale Rantala said David Freeman, 31, of downstate Holland, allegedly took his children, 13-year-old David Freeman and 5-year-old Sadara Freeman, from a foster home in Holland.

He and the children were spotted in the park Monday. A sheriff's deputy and a Michigan Department of Natural Resources conservation officer searched the woods and found Freeman, who told them at which campsite the children were.

Although the sheriff's deputies were considering him armed and dangerous, Freeman was arrested without incident. He is lodged in the Ontonagon County Jail until police officers from Holland arrive to return him downstate, where police said he'll be charged.

"There'll be absolutely nothing in our courts (about this case)," Rantala said.

Rantala said he hadn't see the children but they were unharmed. They were taken by Michigan Department of Human Services employees and placed in a temporary foster home until they can be returned to the Holland foster home.

"They're making arrangements to come pick them up," Rantala said.

Rantala said Freeman didn't say anything about why he took the children from the foster home.

"Honestly, we didn't ask him," Rantala said.

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June 6, 2007

Bill sparks culture war

Proposal would allow second adult in nontraditional family to adopt

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

SOUTHFIELD -- Karen Oosterhous is due to give birth to her first child in July and wants her lesbian partner to adopt him, so he can have a second legal parent.

But Michigan law only allows married couples and single people to adopt children, prompting legislation to allow adoptions by a second adult raising a child in a nontraditional family -- including unmarried couples, the partners of gay couples or two relatives.

The issue has ignited a culture war between religious conservatives and children's advocates. Opponents say gay couples are inappropriate adoptive parents and changing the law would threaten the institution of marriage.

"The state should not be lowering their standards so they can unload kids in homes that are not healthy for them," said Brian Rooney, spokesman for the conservative Thomas More Law Center in Ann Arbor.

Advocates counter that gay people already can adopt children in Michigan, and they provide loving homes.

"This is not a gay issue at all," said Sean Kosofsky of the Triangle Foundation, a gay advocacy organization. "It is about children's rights."

'I can't tell you the sadness'

The effort, known as second parent adoptions, is aimed at providing more prospective parents to the 4,500 foster children available for adoption in Michigan, advocates say.

They also say changing the law would offer children who are being raised in nontraditional homes options for better health care, backup benefits in the event of the death or disability of the primary caregiver and a second person who can legally handle emergency or everyday decisions.

"As of now, my partner does not have any legal rights to our child," said Oosterhous, 36.

"That covers so many things, even the right to pick him up from day care."

As an attorney who previously did pro-bono work for hospice organizations, bill sponsor Rep. Paul Condino, D-Southfield, had to tell dying mothers that they would have to relinquish their rights to their children in order for their unmarried partners to adopt and raise them.

"I can't tell you the sadness," said Condino, adding it has bipartisan support in the House and support is growing in the Senate.

Many child welfare agencies also support it because they often work with relatives and unmarried partners caring for children.

"We can license live-together partners to foster children," said Robert Ennis, head of the Ennis Center for Children. "They have these kids for three or four years. Then we have to tell them -- 'Only one of you can adopt.' It's ridiculous. How you can you be good enough to be foster parents but only one of you can adopt?"

Best interests of child cited

Second parent adoption laws have been passed in nine states, and a handful of other states are considering similar legislation. Local supporters include the State Bar of Michigan Family Law Section, the Michigan Department of Human Services and Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

"The best interests of children are always paramount," said Liz Boyd, Granholm's spokeswoman.

But last month when legislation was voted out of the House Judiciary subcommittee, religious conservatives began fighting it.

"We think the law should be changed to not allow homosexuals to adopt as individuals," said Gary Glenn, head of the Midland-based American Family Association of Michigan. "It is not in the best interest of the child."

Brad Snavelly, executive director of the Michigan Family Forum, added: "It's really not about whether unmarried people love children or can care adequately for children. The legislation would undermine the institution of marriage."

If opponents of the legislation invest the same amount of energy into recruiting adoptive parents or adopting children themselves as they do fighting gays, Michigan's foster care caseload could be dramatically reduced, said Beverly Davidson, head of the Coalition for Adoption Rights Equality, which is working to pass the law.

"We have too many kids in desperate situations to be spewing that kind of nonsense," Davidson said. "It's an abomination they want to spend their money and time to ban kids from getting adopted."

Impact on foster kids

In 2006, 2,589 children were adopted from Michigan's foster care system. Of those, 1,621 went to married couples, 907 to single females and 61 to single males.

An internal analysis by the Michigan Department of Human Services showed second parent adoptions, if approved, likely wouldn't have an impact on the state's foster children available for adoption, spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said.

Even so, Debraha Watson, a former foster child who aged out of the system, supports the legislation.

The five foster homes Watson lived in were headed by married couples, but she was abused sexually in one and physically in another.

"It's about stability for the child and having a person that can provide them with guidance and direction and love," said Watson, a

Westland resident. "You cannot blanketly say only a traditional mother and father can give that."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Hot topic

Legislation that would allow a second adult to adopt a child has come under fire. Here's what both sides are saying:

Advocates

It would give adopted children numerous rights from two legal caregivers.

It would give children more opportunities to be adopted from foster care.

It is not a gay issue; single gays already can adopt children.

Opponents

Gay couples are inappropriate parents.

Institution of marriage would be threatened.

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Pilot health insurance plan to enroll 300 more

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

BARRIE BARBER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

As one of seven communities nationwide -- the only one in Michigan -- Saginaw County is moving forward with a pilot plan to help those lacking adequate health insurance.

Theresa M. Sproull, a single mom and college graduate, joined more than 20 people who enrolled Tuesday in the Saginaw Health Plan.

The 30-year-old Sproull was left without insurance after she lost her job in January at the Holland Area Arts Council. She and her 10-month-old daughter, Ava, moved in with a relative in Saginaw Township.

Sproull enrolled her daughter for Medicaid health benefits.

"A day without health insurance is kind of scary," said Sproull, who has rheumatoid arthritis and asthma. "Without insurance, I would have racked up enormous bills."

The Healthcare Leadership Council of Washington, D.C., and a coalition of Saginaw County health providers hope to enroll at least 300 more uninsured people before the end of the month.

Approximately 700 people previously enrolled.

The Leadership Council chose Saginaw County for the health insurance initiative because of its mix of urban, rural, minority and elderly populations and a history of social service agencies working collaboratively, said Mike Nowlin, Health Access America-Saginaw County spokesman.

The sign-up effort will travel this month to at least two dozen spots around the county, he said.

Sproull enrolled during a two-hour sign-up at the East Side Soup Kitchen, 940 E. Genesee in Saginaw.

The Saginaw Health Plan offers a number of options, with various funding provisions involving federal, state, local and private sources.

Saginaw County has 25,000 to 40,000 uninsured residents, 80 percent of whom are in poor working families, said Natasha Coulouris, public health officer for the County Department of Public Health.

"We're talking about hard-working men and women who have to choose between health insurance and buying dinner," she said. "We should not have to make those decisions."

Janet D. Olszewski, director of the state Department of Community Health, said more than a million people statewide have no insurance.

"The statistics are still very sobering," she said. "We cannot sustain that."

The health insurance initiative in Saginaw could act as a model for other communities, she said.

As more employers slash health benefits, alternatives are springing up. Sixty-eight of Michigan's 83 counties offer a public health insurance plan; health initiatives geared toward children have expanded for services such as dental care and the state has issued the Michigan prescription drug discount card, the MI-Rx Card, to 43,000 people.

Olszewski said Democratic Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm has called for a \$1 billion Michigan First Health Care Plan to provide insurance to 550,000 uninsured people. Modeled after a similar plan in Massachusetts,

federal, state and private payers would cover the cost.

The federal government has to approve a change in Medicaid rules to fund the initiative, Olszewski said. v

Barrie Barber covers politics and government for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9725.

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Violent youths damaging county budget as well

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

BARRIE BARBER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Stung by the rising costs of foster care and housing juvenile criminals, several Saginaw County leaders say it's time to consider opening a boot camp or reform school to cut expenses and stem the tide of violent teen behavior.

Nice idea, Saginaw County Controller Marc A. McGill said Monday, but the expense to open and run separate institutions -- one for abused and neglected foster children, the other for teens who commit serious crimes such as murder, carjacking and rape -- would exceed the \$1.6 million the county now pays annually for both.

County Board of Commissioners members, faced with pulling more than \$2 million out of reserves to balance the budget and avoid cuts and layoffs this year, got more bad financial news Monday. They have to come up with an additional \$141,000 to cover foster care expenses and another \$165,000 more than expected mostly to cover the cost of institutionalizing violent youths who have committed serious crimes.

Young teens, who often are mentally or emotionally disturbed, have become more violent in recent years, requiring placement at state training schools that handle the worst offenders, said Barbara J. Beeckman, Saginaw County Family Court deputy administrator.

Many of the youths grew up in harsh circumstances, Beeckman said. Some have witnessed killings or other violent acts -- from having a bike stolen at gunpoint to living in a home shot up in a drive-by -- and followed the same path.

"I've never seen kids so traumatized," said Beeckman, who has worked in the field for more than two decades. "They have seen things we have never seen."

Commissioner Brigitte Braddock, a Saginaw Democrat, suggested a boot camp to help set troubled youth straight. Fellow Commissioner Dennis H. Krafft, a Frankenmuth Republican, wondered whether a reform school might help.

Beeckman said that when some teens who have completed boot camps come home, their progress unravels because they return to the same dysfunctional environment they left.

"It's the community we have to change," she said.

The Family Court oversees 133 permanent wards of the court; more than a dozen are in or headed to high-security training schools.

Krafft said commissioners need to "think outside of the box" to find answers.

Separately, the Saginaw County Department of Human Services has more than 500 abused and neglected children in temporary foster care, said Randy R. Barst, agency director.

A County Child Care Fund set aside nearly \$500,000 to cover those expenses. The price rose when the number of children eligible for state or federally funded foster care dropped, more emotionally troubled youths entered the system or foster parents refused to accept delinquent or abused children in their homes, Barst said.

That added \$282,500 to the cost. The state will cover half the amount, he said.

McGill said he expects the county will dip into its reserves to pay its share. v



E. Kentwood closes after student threatens principal

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

By Nardy Baeza Bickel

The Grand Rapids Press

KENTWOOD -- Thursday was supposed to be the first day of summer vacation for East Kentwood High School juniors Kiersten Erb and Selina Rodriguez.

The teens are not happy that they, along with their classmates, instead have to finish their final exams that day.

A threat against the high school principal canceled classes Tuesday, pushing back the school calendar one day.

"I was surprised and kind of mad because we have to go another day now," said Erb, 17, who spent Tuesday preparing for English and Spanish tests now scheduled for Thursday.

Rodriguez, 16, agreed. "I studied a lot. I wanted to get (the tests) over with. Most people want to be done, and they're not happy with the day off.

"I have no motivation after this."

Students at the district's high school and freshman building were to return today after authorities said a 16-year-old student admitted to initiating the threat, which was to cause bodily harm to the high school's principal.

Reached at his home, Principal Joe Beel declined to comment.

Kent County sheriff's investigators determined the threat was not credible, and the principal, staff and students never were in danger.

The incident is being forwarded to Kent County Juvenile Court officials for review.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kalamazoo Gazette

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

Why aren't parents responsible for teens?

I am writing about the vicious assaults on innocent victims who were simply walking down the streets of Kalamazoo.

Where are the parents of the teens in these groups? Do they know where their children are? Do they know what their children are doing? Do they know that their children are beating people up and laughing about it?

What is up with all this violence? I am tired of reading about it in the newspapers and on TV!

We need to clean up our streets. This society has got to change!!

Where are the programs and agencies that are helping to keep kids doing positive things, instead of destroying communities and neighborhoods?

There are a lot of really good teens, doing positive things! Why can't they help each other?

Parents, don't allow your children to participate in violent acts of any kind!

Parents, teach your children to be kind, and to love people. They need to learn how to help others, they need to become good law-abiding citizens and good neighbors!

Send your children to church and to youth programs.

Parents, this is your fault and your problem. You fix it!

Dorothy Kaliati

Gobles



Two public officials living on poverty 'wage' for a week

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

BARRIE BARBER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Andy Coulouris and Randy R. Barst will eat a lot of cereal this week.

They'll have \$5 a day to fill their stomachs, at least until Friday.

Coulouris, a Democratic state representative from Saginaw, was the sole legislator to take the Center for Civil Justice's Food Stamp Challenge to live on the \$5 a day, or less, that most welfare recipients receive, a lawyer with the agency said.

"It's going to be incredibly difficult to eat healthy meals for the week," Coulouris said. "I'm going to be stuck eating food far less healthy than anyone should be stuck with eating in their life. But that's the reality of poverty."

Coulouris, who said that when he was a child his family received food stamps for a time, expects his grocery list will fill up with pasta and noodles.

Tuesday, he ate a bowl of cereal as his first meal, a Hot Pocket microwaveable lunch and a turkey pot pie for dinner.

The day before, he ate cereal for breakfast, two red skin potatoes for lunch and dined on a macaroni and cheese dinner. He drank water.

"It's not much," he said. "No snacks, no drinks, no nothing."

Barst, director of the Saginaw County Department of Human Services, has foregone restaurant meals, skipped a steak dinner after a Monday golf outing and instead opted for a bowl of cereal and a hot dog.

For the most part, Barst has subsisted on a diet of oat bran cereal, beans, rice and yogurt, perhaps stretching the \$5 limit by a buck or two.

"I feel a little famished," Barst said. "It's been very difficult."

About 86,000 more Michigan residents found themselves on food stamps last year, contributing to a 76.8 percent increase in food stamp use between 2001 and 2006, a report released today shows. Michigan had the fifth-highest recipient growth rate in the country since 2002, the Food Research and Action Center, a Washington-based advocacy group, reported.

"Michigan certainly is among the hardest-hit economies in the states right now," said Terri Stangl, executive director of the Center for Civil Justice, an anti-poverty group with offices in Flint and Saginaw. "We are one of the most extreme examples of what happens when the economy goes bad, and food stamps are part of filling the gap for families."

In 2006, Michigan averaged 1.1 million recipients per month using food stamps to supplement their food budget, the state Department of Human Services said. Michigan recipients accessed \$1.2 billion in food stamp assistance in 2006 -- up \$140 million from the year before.

The point of the Food Stamp Challenge is to illustrate the plight welfare recipients face, said Terri Winegarden, a staff attorney with the Center for Civil Justice in Saginaw. They haven't had a major rise in food stamp aid in more than a decade.

Winegarden hopes Congress increases aid when they renew the farm bill, which earmarks money for food

aid. "A large part of the problem is that the benefits have eroded," she said.

In Saginaw County, about 34,000 people receive food stamps, or more than 15,000 households, she said.

Many face the choice of paying fast-rising utility and fuel bills or buying food, she said.

Coulouris said his staff has looked into how to attract supermarkets to open in underserved areas. One legislative option might involve tax incentives to locate in a specific area.

"It's a related topic," he said. "We're going to keep digging on this one because it's an important topic for my district." v

Sarah Kellogg of The Saginaw News Lansing Bureau contributed to this report.

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Kalamazoo Gazette

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

By Jack Urban

I recently participated in a poverty simulation, sponsored by the Kalamazoo County Poverty Reduction Initiative and held at the Douglass Community Center.

It is designed to raise the awareness of people of privilege -- those who have never experienced poverty first hand. In the simulation, we adopt the identity of a fictitious person who is single or a family member and live through four weeks, having little money and many responsibilities.

In the simulation, I was a 50-year-old grandmother with two elementary school age grandkids to care for. My husband had a full-time job that paid \$11 an hour, and I had a part-time job that paid \$9.50 an hour. We managed to pay the mortgage, the utilities, the telephone bill, the car loan, \$55 worth of clothes and bought enough food for three of the four weeks.

By the end of the month, we had money left over, but that was only because I paid only \$35 for my grandson's ADD prescription when the actual cost was \$350 for the month. We were pleased with ourselves because we thought we had fooled the pharmacist into thinking we had medical insurance, so we only had to provide the co-pay.

My conclusion when the simulation ended was, wouldn't it be great if everyone had universal health care? Then people could be healthier, and have money left to spend time with their kids instead of being out on the street -- going from one crisis to another in earning money or paying bills while the kids are home alone, or being tempted to hustle someone or use some other creative but questionable arrangement to get by.

However, the person who played the role of the pharmacist told us afterward that she put only \$35 worth of medicine in the bag, a tenth of what is needed to keep our grandson calm and out of trouble. As it was, we were lucky that our grandchild wasn't suspended from school or involved in serious mischief while he was home alone. To make ends meet, we had cheated on our grandson's medication.

In the discussion that followed the simulation, we learned that nearly all the participants became worn down by the stress, and some were tempted to cheat shopkeepers, or to get loans they knew they were unlikely to pay back.

Some creative folk, cash-desperate themselves, resorted to subletting rooms of their apartments to those who had been evicted. Some pawned valuables, or sold worthless second-hand appliances. Nearly all of us found ourselves doing, by the end of the four weeks, things we never felt the necessity to do before.

I urge you to enroll in this two-hour simulation, offered by the Poverty Reduction Initiative. I promise it will open your eyes.

Jack Urban, of Kalamazoo, is a member of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR



The Michigan
Heart Gallery

News Release

Contact: Jan Berry (517) 373-7394 or Regina Funkhouser, MI Heart Gallery Coordinator (800) 589-6273

2007 Michigan Heart Gallery on Display in Alpena

Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption

June 6, 2007

ALPENA – “What I want for myself in this life is a family”

The statement above was made by 16 year-old Danielle, who is waiting to be adopted. Many of us take being part of a family for granted. A family provides the simplest comforts like having someone who cares where you are and asks, “How was your day?”

Today in Michigan there are more than 4,000 children without families. These children wait and hope every day for someone to adopt them and give them families of their own. Most of these children are not newborns or infants, but older children; many live with the trauma of abuse and neglect, have medical issues, or need special help.

Some of the children waiting to be adopted are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The 2007 Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display from June 7 through June 29 at Art in the Loft gallery, 109 N. Second Avenue, Suite 300, in Alpena. An exhibit opening is scheduled for Thursday, June 7 from 6 – 8 p.m. and will also feature “Meet the Artists” of the Summerview exhibit, which is on display at Art in the Loft until September 1.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network, and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for permanent homes. The Michigan Heart Gallery features professional photos of some of Michigan’s waiting children, who come from various regions of the state. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by dozens of professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. These kids were

actively involved in the photo shoot experience some selecting which portrait to feature in the Heart Gallery, and others coming up with their own poses and settings.

“Most of the children featured in the Heart Gallery have been waiting for a long time to find a family of their own,” Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. “While we hope children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children, who need families, then they may be forgotten. The Heart Gallery is an amazing undertaking and we are thrilled the public will have an opportunity to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them.”

These waiting children have simple requests. “I would like to live with a nice family that would let me play on the football team,” explains one boy. “My best thoughts about getting a family is that I hope they are nice,” shares another.

Some of the children in the Michigan Heart Gallery have been waiting to be adopted for several years and are now teenagers. Each year, approximately 450 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21, leave the foster care system because of their age. These youths do not have a family to stand up at their wedding, a place to go home for the holidays, or a family safety net of any kind. The Michigan Heart Gallery seeks to encourage prospective parents to adopt an older child, so these children can have a vital connection to a supportive adult during adolescence, as young adults, and beyond.

Another piece of the Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery features three families that have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

“These families show others that it is possible to build a wonderful family through adoption,” Udow said. “Despite the rough times they might have faced in the past, they prove how much love and care can do for these children.”

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Since 2001, the Heart Gallery has expanded to other states and cities.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit the Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org

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